

## WALK AND TALK – LOCAL HISTORY

We are a Christian Community. **As we walk**, we rejoice in God’s creation, the wonder and beauty of the many delightful places we visit. **As we talk**, we enjoy each other’s company giving us time to share and listen to each other. Then afterwards we relax, recover and have **lunch** together. This is a brief description of 22 walks we have organised since July 2013 as a group from Walton Methodist Church, viewing and passing interesting places which reflect our local history. More information about each place can be found on Google, Wikipedia and leaflets issued by Surrey County Council, the National Trust and other organisations.



### PLACES OF WORSHIP

**Chertsey Abbey** The abbey was built in 666AD under the direction of Saint Erkenwald, who became bishop of London. It became very rich, owning 90,000 acres in north-west Surrey as far as Bookham and Croydon. However, in 875AD their wealth attracted the Vikings, whose war ships sailed up the Thames, killed about 90 priests and made off with substantial loot. At the height of its power the abbey was 275 feet long, about the size of Westminster Abbey, and was one of the most important abbeys in England. It was destroyed around 1537 with the dissolution of monasteries, most of its stone being removed to build Otlands Palace and other buildings. We walked past the abbey ruins (picture) in January 2020, viewing the remains of some walls, the fish pond and Abbey River which the monks used to power their water mill.



**Guildford Cathedral** In January 2016 we walked around Guildford Cathedral and the nearby Surrey University campus on top of Stag Hill. This Cathedral Church of the Holy Spirit was consecrated in 1961, with a diocese covering most of Surrey. Over 200,000 people paid 2s 6d as part of the “Buy a brick” campaign, run from 1952-61 to raise money to complete the project, The late Jim Grave and Margaret and Joy Walsh in our walking group were all involved in buying a brick. During our visit asbestos was being removed from the ceiling for health and safety reasons – at a considerable cost.

**Saint Martha’s Church, Pilgrims Way** In November 2013 we walked up Halfpenny Lane, near Guildford, to St Martha’s Church which was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, then rebuilt 1848-50, probably as a marker for pilgrims travelling along Pilgrim’s Way to Canterbury. The North Downs here rises to 574 feet, the Greensand Ridge providing sandy paths much easier to walk on than the sticky mud of the valley bottoms! It has been a popular venue for weddings and has a tradition of being floodlit on Christmas Eve. It is one of three churches in England dedicated to St Martha, another being a Methodist one in Tring. Duncan’s relatives, Robin (aged 100) and Edith Norton have a memorial stone. Also buried here is Yvonne Arnaud, founder of the Guildford theatre.



**Walton Prayer Walk** In some years we have organised a Prayer Walk for places and people in Walton. In May 2018 a group of us walked and prayed around the centre of Walton. This included the Garden of Remembrance at the back of St Mary’s, Walton Recreation Ground, shops along the High Street, The Heart shopping centre, Riverside Barn, Day Centre, Bradshaw House, and the Methodist Church (picture). On a previous occasion we prayed for places and people along the Thames Path at Walton.



## VIEWS

**Epsom Common** The London Clay here was difficult to cultivate, so the land was set aside for pastureland, and wood harvesting (pollarding) by the owners, Chertsey Abbey. Later it was a venue for horse racing. When



cows refused to drink from one pond, "Epsom Salts" (aluminium sulphate - a cure for constipation) was discovered in 1618. So, for about 100 years Epsom became one of the leading Spa towns in England. The above painting of Epsom Common was by John Constable. Epsom and Ashted Commons combine to form a site of national importance for nature conservation, being classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In August 2014 we walked across the racecourse and meadowland (picture), enjoying the panoramic views of London to the north.



**Painshill** In November 2014 we went to Painshill on an open Day with free entry, to enjoy the 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape garden built in 1773, now owned by Elmbridge Borough Council. Being part of the Landscape



Movement, it moved away from geometric formality to a more naturalistic design. We walked around the lake, filled from the River Mole by a powered water wheel, admired the many follies, and looked into the crystal grotto which was then being restored. A feature of the park is a giant Cedar of Lebanon, thought to be the largest in Europe. Its scenic value has made it a location for film and TV productions.

**Richmond Park – St Pauls Cathedral** In September 2013 we walked around Sidmouth Wood and ended with lunch at the Pembroke Lodge. Then we went for a short walk to the north, where there is a pre-historic burial chamber (also known as the King Henry V111 Mound), to view St Paul's Cathedral with the aid of a telescope and the protected view (picture). No buildings or trees are permitted to block this view of St Pauls. Parks with deer can have ticks which bite and spread Lyme disease. So, we advise walkers to avoid areas of damp bracken. In Richmond Park the numbers are kept to about 300 Red Deer and 350 Fallow deer.



**Virginia Water** This lake at the southern end of Windsor Great Park, is in both Surrey and Berkshire. In June 2014 we walked the 4.5 miles around the lake, which was created in 1768 by a dam across the River Bourne. We saw the totem pole, made of Western Red Cedar, which the Canadians gave to the Queen in 1958. It has no religious significance but tells of legendary tribal history. We saw the collection of ornamental Roman



remains placed in 1825; and the dam and cascade built in 1780. The original dam was destroyed by a flood in 1768 only 20 years after it was constructed. This scenic lake has featured in several films including some of Harry Potter. The park is one of our most popular venues with a convenient café and restaurant.

**Windsor Castle from The Village** On Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2016 we walked through The Village, which is almost at the centre of Windsor Great Park. The next day was the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, so we were treated to viewing the massive beacon prepared at the top of Snow Hill, to the east of The village, which would be lit with many other beacons across the country to celebrate the event. From Snow Hill there is an impressive view to the north of Windsor Castle in all its splendour.



## RIVERS



**Source of River Wey, Alton** In July 2016 the walking group and some others from Walton Methodist Church went to Alton to visit Sue and Allan, in their new house. Allan took us on a walk which included the source of the River Wey and the St Lawrence Parish Church.

**London Stone, Staines-on-Thames** King Richard 1 (The Lionheart) fought in the third crusade in the Holy Land, attempting to remove Saladin from Jerusalem. He failed in this quest, but unlike some of the other leaders, he never ran out of cash and never lost a battle by avoiding battles he could not win. A lasting benefit to Europe was the capture of Cyprus and removal of pirates, which secured the valuable trade routes to the east. Consequently, parts of Italy became wealthy which spread and helped to end the European Dark Ages. The advances in arts, science and exploration, peaked around 1550. A useful source of Richard's wealth was the sale of his royal fishing (riparian) rights in the River Thames and its tributaries in 1197 to the wealthy City of London. In February 2018 we walked up the river to Staines bridge, stopping to look at the "London Stone" erected to mark the tidal limit in 1197 which was the limit of the City of London's purchased fishing rights. The Thames tidal limit is now at Teddington Weir.



**River Wey at Shalford** In September 2017 we walked from Shalford and along the River Wey towpath. We crossed the river by bridge, where walkers on the Pilgrim's Way could cross. This is an ancient crossing point once served by a ferry. The tow path here was covered for a short distance by sand (picture). Our lunch at a local inn was memorable by the waiter saying to one of our walkers "here is your whale and chips, madam" when a large fish was given with her chips!



**Thames Path – Kingston to Hampton Court** In March 2016 we walked from Molesey Boat Club to Hampton Court, then took a bus to Kingston Bridge, walking back along the River Thames (picture) to Hampton Court where we had lunch. We passed the two impressively high flood marks engraved on the walls of a café. These floods both occurred in the 1800s and were much higher than any more recent ones. Salmon used to be caught at Molesey Weir, but this is no longer permitted (too easy to catch there?!).



**Wey Navigation – Ripley to Weybridge** We have walked along parts of this towpath on several occasions, once joining the Wey Valley Circuit walk who went from Godalming to the Methodist Church in Weybridge. In 1653 the Wey Navigation was the new easier way to get from Guildford to London. It opened 100 years before the start of the canal age in England, conveying a variety of goods to London. Today it is owned and maintained by the National Trust who have information points in Guildford and Weybridge.



## **HISTORY – LANDMARKS**

**Chatley Heath** We visited this site in June 2016, walking across heathland to the semaphore tower near the M25. This is the last preserved tower in a line of 15 that took messages in just 15 minutes from the Admiralty in London to the naval dockyard in Portsmouth. It is 60 feet high and operated between 1822-47, when an invasion was feared from France. The heathland is managed to encourage native wildlife, with habitats sustained, for example, for 5 species of reptile and various rare birds.



**Chobham Common - Queen Victoria** In August 2017 we visited that part of Chobham Common to the north of the M3. This is owned by Surrey County Council and managed by the Surrey Wildlife Trust, being one of the finest examples of lowland heath left in the world. It is thus not surprising that it has the highest national and European conservation status, with 29 species of butterfly, half of Britain's dragonfly species and over 350 species of plants. We stopped to look at the Memorial Cross erected in 1901 to mark the spot where Queen Victoria reviewed over 8,000 troops in 1853.



**Hampton Court – Real Tennis** Quite a large group of us were invited by the late Graham Aston to watch him play a game of Real Tennis in Hampton Court Palace in April 2014. This court was built by Cardinal Wolsey in 1526-29 and King Henry V 111 played there from 1528. There are over 50 such courts in the world, located in UK, Australia, USA and Australia. The court is quite different from that of lawn tennis and the balls are hand made of cork and layers of cloth. We saw some balls being made – they have a rather uneven bounce!



**Brooklands and Mercedes Benz** In January 2015 we had a great day out at “Mercedes-Benz World” in Brooklands. This included paying for a tour guide who explained the history of the very old cars on view, the cars made to fit the physique of racing driver Lewis Hamilton, and the various driving experiences available. We returned in October 2018, walking in the rain (picture) around part of the old motor racing circuit. This was 2.75 miles long and was the first purpose built banked racing car track in the world, used 1907-39. Thanks to David Conly, our American friend, for the photo.



**Runnymede Memorials** The meadow at Runnymede is the likely site of King John signing Magna Carta in June 1215, the first step on the road to modern democracy based on freedom, equality and the rule of law. Soon after the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in July 2015, we went to see the new “Jurors Artwork”, a collection of 12 decorated chairs with symbols depicting the struggles for freedom both past and present. We sat and meditated on the issues raised.



**Sunbury – embroidery and Huguenots** We have been to Sunbury twice, in February 2016 and 12 months later, both times going to the café in the Walled Garden and viewing the millennium embroidery nearby. This is housed in a special gallery as the largest part measures 9 ft x 3 ft. (picture). It was completed by over 140 people in 2000 and was sufficiently important for the queen to come and see. We walked down French



Street which commemorates the arrival of French Huguenot refugees to the area. They arrived in England from south and west France with 50,000 others, due to persecution between 1572-1685. Today one service every Sunday in Canterbury Cathedral is still in French.

We are pilgrims on a journey,  
And companions on the road;  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load. StF 611 v2